

## Linger

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# Linger

by [apathyinreverie](#)

## Summary

Nie Mingjue's spirit lingers after his death. He sees everything, all the while unable to interfere or make his presence known in any way, less than a specter of a soul that had once been. It is its own kind torture.

Right until Guanyin Temple, where everything comes to light, and Wei Wuxian finally puts his spirit to rest, finally leaving him to sleep forevermore.

...or so Mingjue had assumed.

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Mingjue's awareness lingers after his death.

It is out of no desire or wish of his own.

His death was a violent one, Qi deviation at its finest, no matter its source. It should be the kind of death that either rips a spirit apart, leaving it scattered and impossible to re-form into its previous consciousness. Or leaving it a resentful presence the sort of which will take an entire sect to subdue.

Instead, he is neither. Neither ghost nor spirit or any other resentful, lingering presence. He just is. Still aware, still present, but also utterly removed from the world of the living or the dead. Not even a vengeful, resentful specter haunting those left behind by his brutal death.

Quite honestly, he does not really know what to make of it.

If only because his own death *does* still make him furious, still leaves him thirsting for vengeance upon those responsible. Thus, there should still be resentment lingering from it.

His fury is not so much born from his death itself, not because he died at all or even due to the way he died. He has known since he was young that Qi deviation would be the way he'd die, even if battle didn't claim him. It is the price his sect and family pays for their method of cultivation.

So, it isn't the way he died that has him furious. Same for the fact that his death had been even more abrupt and brutal than it usually tends to come about for Nies, if only due to the fact that his end had been deliberately provoked, his insanity coaxed forth and nurtured purposely by those around him. Very much in contrast to any other Qi deviation amongst his sect he has ever witnessed. But even that leaves him somewhat passive.

No, the thing that has him furious, seething with wrath, is the fact that the two people he has loved most throughout his life, A-Sang and Xichen, were made to suffer so in the process. Xichen's kindness turned into a tool to help Mingjue's destruction along. A-Sang's cheerful trust betrayed by one calling himself their *brother*, sworn or not.

And, before all else, the fact that his little brother was made to watch Mingjue's brutal end.

It is the one thing he had always hoped to avoid, for his brother to never witness his descent into madness, for A-Sang to never have any reason to fear him, to never have to remember Mingjue in a state where he could not recognize him any longer.

It is that which has endless resentment curling through him.

In death, many things become clear.

Jin Guangyao had played him. Him and Xichen and A-Sang and the entire damn cultivation world. A true master at manipulation beyond that which Mingjue can grasp, even now, in death, with the benefit of hindsight, unable to see how Jin Guangyao had managed to play them all so seamlessly, on a playing board only he could see.

However, considering that very ability to manipulate any situation as he pleases, Jin Guangyao *could* certainly have prevented A-Sang from being there in Mingjue's last moments, could have prevented his little brother having to witness his end. But he hadn't. Instead, he had made his brother watch as Mingjue lost himself to their clan's ultimate fate, no longer able to subdue the resentment coiling within him, at that point no longer fully himself, his mind taken over by the resentment he had fought off for so long.

A-Sang's desperate calls still echo in his now-non-existent mind.

Jin Guangyao truly is cruel to those very few who had ever made the mistake of loving him in any manner, to abuse the trust given to him in such ways.

The tools towards Mingjue's own death provided freely, if unknowingly, by the very people who would have done anything within their power to prevent it. Xichen's musical cultivation shared with their sworn brother for Mingjue's sake. And A-Sang's trust into a man Mingjue himself had brought into their home, *twice*.

He desperately hopes that neither of them ever finds out. That they will never realize the truth of his death and thus how they had contributed, how wrongly placed their own trust had been.

In those final moments before he had felt that wave of resentment crash through him, sweeping away the last of his sanity, oddly enough, one of Mingjue's very last, conscious thoughts had been about one Wei Wuxian.

He remembers thinking of the irony of himself dying a sect leader, still revered and celebrated, while Wei Wuxian had died alone and so very feared for his power, his reputation of cruelty maybe justified but just as likely brought about by the resentment forever tugging at his mind as Mingjue's end was not of his own choice. In the end, they had both succumbed to such similar fates. Their Cores corrupted by resentment willingly cultivated, eradicating what little humanity might have still remained of them.

Well, at least that's what he had always assumed about Wei Wuxian's life and his justified end.

Of course, he learns better in the following years. As he drifts but is also always fully present, in the here and now just as he is already part of the beyond.

And while death in itself is surprisingly peaceful.

His observations of the living world most assuredly are not.

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Mingjue sees everything.

He sees A-Sang's devastation at losing him, his helpless grief, loudly fake wailing in the presence of others but genuine tears spilled in the privacy of his rooms as he mourns in a way Mingjue is humbled to see.

He is unable to interfere in any way, to make his presence known, to give his brother any sort of closure, somehow less than a specter of a soul that had once been, neither ghost nor spirit, despite the unholy, seething mass of resentment he carries within his chest at the betrayal of one he had maybe not liked but trusted enough to let him near. Far *too* near, as he now knows, to himself and the two people he treasured most.

His resentment swells. And promptly releases once more, not because he finds any way of settling it but rather like... it might be strangely siphoned off somewhere else. Mingjue does not much care.

Instead, he drifts, watching, mostly remaining with A-Sang, but sometimes blinking back into his non-existence at Xichen's side whenever he thinks about the other too intensely, but finding himself unable to respond to the soft notes of Inquiry so very tentatively sounding into the night in those first months after his death.

Mingjue is and also isn't at the same time.

Even the other lingering spirits are unable to see him, to hear him, unable to pass on anything about his lingering presence to Xichen. Xichen who has always been soft and kind and so helplessly optimistic about life. There is a reason Mingjue has always adored him as he has never done with another.

Xichen, at least, seems relieved about his supposed absence, to not find his presence lingering, so clearly hoping that Mingjue might have found peace in death, resting fully.

Which he is not.

To the contrary.

For, as he lingers beside A-Sang and Xichen, he is also forced to witness Jin Guangyao smoothly integrating himself into all the gaps Mingjue's absence has left within their lives. If anything, the resentment within him only coils higher, tighter, fury and wrath and hatred spiraling towards new heights. Only to disappear into the void once more, leaving behind mere traces of the utter wrath he feels.

Mingjue can do nothing. Only watch.

He sees his own sect flourish under A-Sang's leadership while his little brother maintains the front of guile-free spinelessness. He sees A-Sang starting to figure things out, realizing how many things about Mingjue's death – and quite a few other things within their world, admittedly – do not quite make sense.

He watches A-Sang move past his grieving devastation, right on to homicidal plotting. Fury and vengeance, the likes of which he has never seen from his little brother, guiding A-Sang's plans of revenge on Mingjue's behalf. As he plays all those around him with his guileless front, lazy and borderline imbecilic. And never once even suspected as anything but the spineless head-shaker he has taken such pains to craft as a mask for anyone else to see.

Mingjue watches on, regretful at his brother's chosen path just as he is unspeakably proud of him, can't be anything but, as A-Sang decides on a path for his revenge, decides to resurrect the one friend he had ever made truly for himself, someone he always trusted to care more about justice than he cares about his own standing or future or anyone's sensibilities, no matter how powerful an enemy he might make in the process.

Wei Wuxian. Who had been vilified by their entire world, for actions – as Mingjue learned alongside his brother – rarely his own, a straw man of evil for everyone to focus on. And thereby forget to be suspicious of anyone else's motives.

Much less the snakes within their own midst.

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Mingjue doesn't really know what to make of Wei Wuxian's resurrection.

The man, reborn into another's body or not, is nothing like the young cultivator Mingjue somewhat got to know during the Sunshot Campaign, fighting alongside him and their armies. He hadn't really known Wei Wuxian before the war, thus only remembers him as pale and determined and looking close to breaking but wielding power unimaginable at the same time.

It hadn't been too difficult for Mingjue to believe others' accounts of Wei Wuxian having turned towards evil, towards cruelty, towards power. When all he'd seen of the man before, still mostly a boy back then, was his inescapable power.

Alas, this Wei Wuxian, the one in Mo Xuanyu's body, is also nothing like the maliciously powerhungry Yiling Patriarch whom the sects had banded together to take down. A creature of cruelty, inhumane and without conscience.

Then again, Mingjue now knows that, at least that latter persona, had only ever been a product of fiction, stoked by manipulative whispers rumoring false truths into existence at the behest of the rot at the very center of the major clans.

Still, Mingjue had admittedly expected a somewhat different reaction upon his resurrection.

Instead, the man comes back in a body not his own, promptly proceeds to make a spectacle of himself, only to then attempt – unsuccessfully – to leave the cultivation world entirely behind, seemingly disinterested in any sort of revenge or seeking out those he once called family. He clearly cares more about making away with the donkey he liberated from its previous owners than he cares about vengeance, perfectly content with traveling on his own. A simple life.

Not quite as one might expect from the 'bloodthirsty' Yiling Laozu.

Watching on from his halfway existence, Mingjue is almost a little amused at A-Sang's exasperation with his former friend, as he has to deliberately herd the Yiling Patriarch towards the mystery which A-Sang himself painstakingly laid out as breadcrumbs for others to find.

Well, Wangji's presence certainly doesn't seem to help with Wei Wuxian's distraction.

Xichen's little brother who is known as Hanguang-jun nowadays, man of the people, a savior for those none of the high-and-mighty clans can be bothered to protect. Mingjue has watched him over the years as well, at least somewhat, has seen Wangji's continued disapproval of the major sects in general and anything they do in particular. Wangji's determination to bring about good, to do better, to be all that the sects have always been supposed to be, is certainly humbling to observe.

And, as it turns out, as long as Wangji is around, Wei Wuxian – reincarnated or not – seems to have very little attention to spare for anything else. Something which seems to be very much true in reverse, if Wangji's utter, immovable focus upon Wei Wuxian, his unapologetic indulgence of his every request, is anything to go by.

Which, well... It does put the rumors about Hanguang-jun's and the Yiling Patriarch's dynamic of supposed hatred into a... rather different perspective, doesn't it.

Rumors.

How Mingjue has come to loathe rumors *in their entirety* after his death. After seeing the sort of unimaginable damage they can bring upon those unsuspecting. Even those rumors that hold a kernel of truth – as the saying goes – still tend to be twisted to a point where they might as well be called outright lies. And they never seem to bring about anything good. Ever.

Maybe the Lans had it right on that point for once, their rule about not listening to rumors and hearsay. Not that they themselves seem to adhere to that particular rule.

However, watching Wangji's softly desperate determination to never so much as leave Wei Wuxian's side after his rebirth, Mingjue thinks for the first time that, amongst the countless manipulations and malicious twisting of fates, it might in fact not have been his own death that ultimately brought about the most devastation for those left behind in the aftermath.

That it might not have been himself and those he treasures beyond all others, who have suffered most from the betrayals and manipulations of certain individuals within their world.

A thought that is as humbling as it is devastating.

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Everything comes to a head at Guanyin Temple.

Where Jin Guangyao finally shows his true face. To Xichen's utter devastation.

It is hard to witness, the growing desolation within Xichen's features, as he desperately tries to find a reason, anything to make sense of how someone he trusted wholly, someone he adored, loved – like a brother, if not more than that – and only ever wished happiness for, has freely made use of that very trust. In order to bring devastation to everyone Xichen cares about.

The revelations continue piling on.

Xichen's devastation grows, Wangji is furious to a point where his wrath seems to almost become tangible, Wei Wuxian smiles his way through the entire situation.

Even when his Core-less state all throughout the war and its aftermath is revealed.

Mingjue feels himself pausing at that particular revelation, not having picked up on that fact yet. He wonders whether A-Sang had realized as much beforehand or not.

The Jiang sect leader, somehow having found his way into the confrontation as well, is devastated enough for all of them combined. Then again, what must it be like, to realize that the man you once called brother had been willing to sacrifice all of himself for you, sacrifice a part of his very soul for your sake, and you repaid him by abandoning him to his fate. Out of ignorance, maybe, but that seems to be a bit of a theme here, doesn't it?

Still, Mingjue cannot imagine the devastation such a realization would bring.

Then again, he also cannot help but think what it must have been like for Wei Wuxian. To be taken into a sect, to love the children of the House Jiang just like siblings, but to never quite be fully acknowledged by their family in return. Forever a servant, a shield, part of their house but not of their family. His devotion is a thing to be admired.

Even Mingjue, as much as he loves his little brother, had refused to give up his cultivation for him, no matter how much A-Sang begged once he realized why all Nie sect leaders and their best disciples tend to die so very young, why Qi deviation is the most common death for any Nie outside of battle.

Giving up his cultivation had still seemed an impossible sacrifice to make.

For Wei Wuxian to have gone beyond that and given up *his Golden Core*? That is a sacrifice Mingjue had not even considered possible until this point.

And, as the soft notes from Wei Wuxian's dizi finally guide the whole of his lingering presence, his endless resentment, having clung to his body instead of his spirit for some reason, as well as his spirit and consciousness towards their final rest, Mingjue can't help but wonder.

He wonders how differently things might have gone if he had not let himself be blinded by the snakes amongst them as everyone else, back when it would still have made a difference. If he had cared enough to look past his own anger, to maybe even recognize some of the manipulations guiding the cultivation world towards their own demise, everyone – himself included – following along like silly sheep. If he had bothered to care enough about potential injustices being done to at least ensure he himself might have remained on the right side of justice.

As Wei Wuxian was crushed beneath the weight of other men's greed for power. One voice standing up for justice and righteousness. When no one else could be bothered and no one else would stand with him.



And, as the coffin's lid is guided close above himself, Baxia and half of the Yin Tiger Seal pulsing in resentful harmony upon his body's chest, one of his final thoughts is about how differently things might have gone if Wei Wuxian had not been the upstart outsider, speaking above his station, as he was made out to be as soon as he dared stand against those in power.

If the Jiangs had fully adopted him, if Wei Wuxian had been part of the main line of one of the major sects. Where his status would have not allowed for anyone to brush aside his words or twisting spoken truths against him, where ridiculing him and his claims would have been the same as provoking one of the five major sects at the same time. If only due to anyone daring to commit such an insult against one of their own.

He wonders, what the cultivation world might look like if the sole voice for justice could not have been simply ignored. It is a nice thought, he thinks.

Even as darkness envelopes his mind, as his consciousness fades away.

Towards his final, peaceful rest.

Finally.

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Or so he had assumed.

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A-Ying is cold.

A-Ying is cold and hungry and really tired. And maybe also just a little bit lonely.

His feet hurt from walking and his arm *really* hurts from where the shopkeeper hit him two days ago when A-Ying had been trying to steal from his trash.

And A-Ying is *sorry* for stealing, A-Die always said that stealing is bad. But he is just so *hungry*. He hopes his A-Niang and A-Die would be okay with A-Ying stealing when he hasn't had anything to eat since two days ago

Still, as he walks along the edges of the market, trying to remain hidden, he smiles. There is no one for him to smile *at*, no one ever looking fully at A-Ying anymore unless they are really angry at him and then he always has to run.

But his A-Niang always said that A-Ying's smile was her favorite thing in the whole wide world.

So, he smiles. No matter what. Because even if A-Niang and A-Die are gone now, won't ever be able to come back as that one grandmother explained to him a while back, maybe they are still watching. And if they are, then A-Ying wants his A-Niang to be able to see her very favorite thing.

But sometimes, smiling his hard.

Like right now. When his feet hurt and his arm hurts and he is hungry and cold and very alone.

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A-Ying runs, as fast as he can, trying to get away from the barking behind him.

His breathing is coming fast and he is so afraid and he *hates* dogs. Hates hates *hates* them. And he is so very afraid of them.

It is almost dark and his leg *really* hurts from where that dog just bit him, almost as big as A-Ying himself, because it had been trying to steal his food that A-Ying found and A-Ying had been trying to get away. He failed and the dog got his food and A-Ying had only gotten to take two bites from the half-eaten dumpling he'd found and then the dogs had shown up.

And now he doesn't have any food anymore and the dogs are chasing him and his leg hurts really badly and he knows he is crying, too afraid to keep smiling for once.

And then, turning a corner, he runs headfirst into something. Into *someone*, he realizes with fear. Into someone's legs to be specific.

From the ground, having fallen with the impact, he glances up fearfully, flinches back at seeing the fancy robes, dark green and gold and a warm-looking coat with fur at its edges. Someone rich. Someone important. Someone who'll be angry that A-Ying, with his dirty robes and unwashed hands just ran into him.

A-Ying isn't cold anymore. He is too afraid to be cold.

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A-Ying doesn't really know what happened.

Instead of being yelled at or beaten or chased back towards the dogs, he is now being held on someone's hip, wrapped in a large coat, fur tickling his cheeks, so warm he is already having trouble keeping his eyes open. The man he ran into, who *knew* A-Ying, even knew A-Die and A-Niang's names, who hadn't been angry at A-Ying for running into him and only glared at the dogs who'd been chasing after him and they'd all turned around and run away.

*So cool*, he thinks muzzily, held securely as he is being carried. It's been so long since someone held him. Ever since A-Die and A-Niang went away and didn't come back.

The man stops at some point, inside somewhere. Then, voices, A-Ying spotting more people in dark green around them from the small gap in the coat pulled tight around him, so large it covers him entirely. A-Ying wants to stay here. Where it is warm and safe and anyone has yet to yell or hurt him or anything.

Then the arms holding him shift and A-Ying panics a little at the thought of being set down, but the man – Mingjue, he said – is only turning, sitting down and shifting his hold as he

unwraps the coat a little to free A-Ying's leg. And then there is a woman, also in dark green, who checks the wound on his leg and washes it and wraps really clean bandages around it. She calls the man 'zongzhu' and she must be really brave because she sounds like she might be teasing the man. But when she sees A-Ying watching her she just grins at him, broadly. Like she is sharing a joke or... almost like she thinks A-Ying being here might be good thing, in her opinion.

A-Ying blinks. And then he tries to give her his very best smile in return. It doesn't feel all that steady on his face but her smile only gets broader.

Then, the man still holding him hands him some bread. A-Ying holds it in his hands, carefully, doesn't want to hope. There is some movement around them as the other people seem to be packing up.

"Come on," the man grumbles, gruff but also not quite as scary as A-Ying had first thought. "Eat before we leave."

A-Ying blinks. And then, very carefully, breaks off a small piece, just a bite from the bread to eat. He chews, watching the man carefully. Even as he wants to stuff the whole bun into his mouth. He is so hungry. The one bite does not help.

The man huffs.

"All of it," he gruffs.

A-Ying feels his eyes fly up to look at the man. "All of it?" he asks, desperate, stomach-gnawing hope making him a little breathless. "All of it is for... A-Ying?" Because he hasn't had this much to eat at once since... he cannot remember.

The man huffs, then swears, rather loudly. Though not nearly as colorfully as some of the merchants A-Ying has heard sometimes.

"Zongzhu," someone calls from amongst the green-robed people. "Are you sure it's wise to let the kid hear that kind language?"

It sounds teasing. And these people must be really brave to tease someone as scary as... Zongzhu?

"Because my language is definitely the worst he'll pick up on with you lot around, huh, Zonghui?" the man scoffs back. "I know exactly where A-Sang learned his newest phrase when talking about anything he has chosen to detest recently. I'll be sure to show my appreciation during the next training session I can manage."

"Eh," Zonghui laughs dismissively, though he does duck back amongst the other people in green bustling through the room.

And A-Ying thinks that these people are really fun to be around. They all seem happy and friends with one another. And he wishes...

He glances back up at the man who found him and is still holding him, who meets his eyes calmly.

“Eat,” the man says, still gruffly, his entire chest vibrating with his voice but somehow not seeming all that scary anymore. “All of it. And then we’ll go home.”

A-Ying breathes in and he can feel himself starting to smile, brilliantly, his very best, brightest smile.

The smile that had always been his A-Niang’s favorite.

## End Notes

Huh. Don't really know what this is. Kind of just wanted to write a NMJ who doesn't give a fuck and will happily tear apart anything and anyone daring to ever reach for the happiness of those he calls his. I actually hope I'll be able to add to this a little more, because the repercussions of this would be rather endlessly fun to write... We'll see.  
Would love to know what you think :D

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